

Unexpected

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Summary: The Chief isn't what any of them expected. Post Halo 4.

SPOILERS ABOUND, folks.

Unexpected

**Author's Notes: Yes, I'm still gutted about the ending. But, I'm clinging to my #cortanalives mantle and all that. (And 343i, if you guys need any ideas on how to bring Cortana back, just let me know. I have a few ideas.)

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><p>"The Master Chief isn't what I thought he would be."<p>

Palmer's voice cuts through the air, causing Tom to pause his walk back to the bridge. He turns to face the Spartan-IV, eyebrow raised. "How so, Commander?"

She gives him a 'you know exactly what I'm talking about' look. "He interfered with a direct order from the captain and went rogue on Requiem." She crosses her arms. "Not exactly qualities of a Spartan-II."

"Saving humanity is the defining quality of a Spartan." Thoughts of Corbulo seep into his mind. "You know as well as I do that he made the right call, direct order or not."

"Have you read his after-action report?" There was an edge of condescension in her voice. "He claims that Cortana kept the Didact bound until he was able to plant a grenade on his armor. Then, after the Chief armed the nuke, she managed to 'hold back' enough of her to protect him with a sphere of hard light."

Her distrust intrigues the newly-promoted captain. "You don't believe him?"

Palmer hesitates for a second. "Permission to speak freely, sir."

"You know that you can always tell me what's on your mind," Tom gently chides. Open communication is one thing that he expects from his officers.

"I don't know what happened up there, but I doubt that an AI could do what the Chief claims she did. Even if she was Cortana." A heavy silence settles over the room until she speaks again. "Sir, I think that the Chief is..." She takes a second to form the right words. "...emotionally compromised."

Tom lets out an awkward laugh. Even this generation of Spartans sees emotions as some kind of problem to contend with. "Frankly, Palmer, I'd be more concerned if he wasn't emotionally compromised."

Palmer frowns. "She was just an AI. Not a soldier." A heartbeat passes. "Or a real person for that matter."

"Sarah..." he trails off. He had meant what he told the Chief in the observation deck. He may have lost his brother and Chyler, but he can't begin to understand what the Spartan is feeling. "...she was practically a part of him."

Her brows furrow. "Do you think he cared for her?" She seems perplexed at the thought. The Master Chief is a legend in his own time; this reality that he is affected by Cortana's demise upsets the commander.

But, not Tom. In fact, it offers him a little hope. Machines get damaged and have to wait for someone to repair them; humans heal themselves and endure.

He shrugs. "I don't think anyone can understand what they had between them, but, Palmer, give him some time. Underneath all of that beat up armor, he's just as human as you or me." He gives her a look. "And there's nothing wrong with that."

She casts a quick glance to the door that leads to the observation deck. Tom wonders if the Chief is still there looking at Earth, silently mourning.

Then, she nods. "Yes, sir."

The two of them start walking in the direction opposite of the Chief. "You know that ONI is looking for him, right?" she asks offhandedly.

Of course he knows, that's why he went looking for the Chief in the first place. But, after seeing him, he knew the Spartan needed more time before getting thrown back in the bureaucracy of the admiralty. "They've waited over four years, Palmer. They can wait a little longer."

End
file.